

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SINGAP 02294 240945Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 NEA-11 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /099 W
-----098114 241820Z /53

R 240900Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 315
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 2294

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, SREF, BM, BG
SUBJECT: REPRESENTATION BY BANGLADESH TRADE COMMISSIONER CON-
CERNING REFUGEES FROM BURMA

1. ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM HIS GOVERNMENT, BANGLA-
DESH TRADE COMMISSIONER COLONEL YUSUF HYDER CALLED ON ME
MAY 24 TO ASK FOR "MORAL SUPPORT" OF U.S. WITH RESPECT TO
REFUGEES PRESENTLY ENTERING BANGLADESH FROM ARAKAN REGION
OF BURMA. ACCORDING TO COLONEL HYDER, THESE REFUGEES WERE
FOR THE MOST PART LONG-TIME RESIDENTS OF BURMA (AT LEAST
THREE GENERATIONS) AND ALTHOUGH THEY WERE MUSLIMS DID NOT
EVEN SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE AS MAJORITY OF BANGLADESH
PEOPLE. OVER 100,000 HAD ALREADY CROSSED FROM BURMA INTO
BANGLADESH, AND HIS GOVERNMENT EXPECTED AT LEAST 100,000
MORE TO ARRIVE. APPEAL FOR U.S. SUPPORT WAS BEING MADE
ON BASIS OF WELL-KNOWN U.S. STAND IN FAVOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
HE ADDED THAT HE WAS MAKING SIMILAR APPEAL TO REPRE-
SENTATIVES OF OTHER FRIENDLY COUNTRIES IN SINGAPORE.

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PAGE 02 SINGAP 02294 240945Z

2. I ASKED WHAT SPECIFICALLY THE BANGLADESH GOVERN-
MENT WANTED IN TERMS OF SUPPORT FROM THE U.S. AND OTHER
NATIONS. YUSUF REPLIED THAT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE WAS NEEDED TO HELP PROVIDE FOR THE REFUGEES'
NEEDS. BANGLADESH ECONOMY WAS SO STRAINED AND POPULATION
ALREADY SO LARGE THAT THESE ADDITIONAL PEOPLE COULD SIMPLY
NOT BE ACCOMMODATED. OVER THE LONGER PERIOD, HE SAID,

BANGLADESH WOULD WANT THESE REFUGEES TO BE RETURNED TO THEIR ORIGINAL HOMES IN BURMA. YUSUF INDICATED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS CONSIDERING RAISING THIS ISSUE IN THE UNITED NATIONS, ALTHOUGH NO DECISION TO DO SO HAD YET BEEN MADE. YUSUF NOTED THAT THE ICRC AND UNHCR WERE ALREADY PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THE REFUGEES.

3. I TOLD YUSUF THAT I WAS NOT FAMILAR WITH CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS SITUATION OTHER THAN WHAT I HAD READ IN THE LOCAL PRESS, AND WONDERED WHAT THE CAUSE OF EXPULSION OF THESE PEOPLE. YUSUF SAID HE DID NOT KNOW THE REASON, AND ALTHOUGH HE ALLOWED THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN SOME ANTI-BURMESE GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS AMONG THEM, HE BELIEVED THAT THE NUMBER OF THESE WOULD BE QUITE SMALL IN COMPARISON TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS INVOLVED. YUSUF INDICATED THAT CONTINUED INFUX OF REFUGEES WAS ALL THE MORE INEXPLICABLE IN LIGHT OF FACT THAT SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF BANGLADESH PRESIDENT HAD VISITED RANGOON ON THIS MATTER AND BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD ALSO BEEN IN DACCA, POINTING IN BOTH CASES TO AMICABLE SOLUTION.

4. I ASSURED YUSUF THAT I WOULD INFORM WASHINGTON CONCERNING WHAT HE HAD CONVEYED TO ME, AND THAT I BELIEVED HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF THIS SITUATION WOULD SURELY BE GIVEN SERIOUS CONSIDERATION REGARDLESS OF WHAT OTHER FACTORS MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED.
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PAGE 03 SINGAP 02294 240945Z

HOLDRIDGE

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Message Attributes

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